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Barbara J. Rozek

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## "GALVESTONIANS VIEW IMMIGRATION, 1875-1914"

by Barbara J. Rozek

Galveston has seen itself first and foremost as a port city. Its geographic position dictated this view of life and provided the driving force that made Galveston the premier city in Texas during much of the nineteenth century. As a port city, commerce and transportation remained the focus of business and influenced most of the daily activity of the city. While primarily concerned with the current of goods flowing into and out of the port, the tide of people became a major interest as well. For Galvestonians, whatever encouraged or helped the commercial flow of "things" was good for the city. Thus the stream of people through the city was perceived as also good for the city. Immigrants were greeted with a positive eye.

Immigration involves a steady movement of people from one place to another. Galveston nurtured the idea of immigration from its earliest years. It is important to realize that the label "immigrant" was used by nineteenth-century Texans and Galvestonians to mean anybody who moved into the state. The *Galveston Daily News* of May 1, 1870, illustrated this point when it itemized immigrants into Texas for the month of April 1870, as "562 persons, of whom Mississippi contributed the greatest number, 125; Germany, 115; Georgia, 67; Alabama, 55; Illinois, 42; Louisiana, 28; France, 19;..." and so on.<sup>1</sup> To Galveston's citizens, any warm body was part of the progressive flow. Sometimes the newspaper used a format reflecting racial attitudes, but the concept of lumping all newcomers into the category of "immigrant" remained. A later issue noted that one month's arrivals to the Galveston port included 614 "immigrants from Europe." Then it listed 2,134 "immigrants from States," including in that number 303 "colored" immigrants.<sup>2</sup> Sometimes the term "immigrant" would have "foreign-born" or "European" affixed to it, but more typically it had a generic connotation referring to anyone on the move. For the people of Galveston, emigrant and immigrant and later home-seeker were terms used interchangeably in oral communication and on the pages of their newspapers.

Historians often use newspapers as a window into the communities of the past. Frequently they are a crucial source for social and cultural information about an area. Galveston had many journalists and several newspapers over the years. The comings and goings of the citizenry are chronicled on the pages of these papers. Galvestonians seemed to enjoy the opportunity to observe the migrants. Their descriptions tell us as much about the Galvestonians as about the newcomers.

A key theme emerges upon reading the various newspaper columns in relation to the city's view of immigration. Galvestonians primarily saw their city as a conduit or pipeline to the interior—sometimes the interior of Texas, but also the interior of the nation. They saw themselves as charged with the task of helping the immigrant upon his or her arrival in the city. They saw immigration as intimately connected to their success as a port city and the outward flow of goods from their wharf. All together immigration and the immigrant were seen

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*Barbara J. Rozek lives in Houston, Texas, and currently works as an editorial assistant for the Jefferson Davis Papers at Rice University.*

through the business-colored glasses as positive influences on the city's commerce and the city's reputation as a port of consequence.

When the September 21, 1882 issue of the *News* conveyed information that the steamship *Weser* was leaving Bremen and sailing for Galveston, it was announcing to Galveston the soon-to-be influx of immigrants. It also was speaking as if Galveston was the funnel for the rest of the state. William W. Lang, representative of the Southwestern Immigration Company, reported that the vessel would be "carrying between 800 and 1000 German immigrants for Texas." Note the phrase "for Texas."<sup>1</sup> The same attitude prevailed twenty-seven years later when the *Galveston Tribune* noted an arrival from Hanover, Germany, of 1,025 passengers on May 20, 1907. In typical fashion the paper stated that the "homeseekers were allowed to come ashore today and in most cases they were given employment and will take their departure for different points in the state and elsewhere tonight."<sup>2</sup>

As if sliding the new arrivals right on through the city, the newspaper reported that immigrants were "destined for different portions of the State." Another way of printing the same message read, "they will...be gone on their journey to their future homes." One news article noted the arrival of forty immigrants from Bremen via the ship *George Washington*: "They were brought to the city and distributed among the different boarding-houses. They will go forward by rail to-day to Schulenberg, San Antonio, Huntsville and other points." This funneling process also indicates the awareness that a clear railhead/port connection existed. While Galveston saw itself as the premier port for the state, it also worked vigorously to develop its rail connections with the rest of the state. Immigrants found themselves part of the water movement and rail movement of the time.<sup>3</sup>

Complementary to seeing themselves as the passageway for immigrants to the hinterlands of the state, Galvestonians took on the task of caring for the newcomers as they arrived. In the beginning this was done in a fairly informal way, but later it evolved into official organizations setting up a formalized structure for immigrant aid. The *Galveston Daily News* supported these efforts. As an activist for community involvement in the immigration flow, the *News* spoke to the community about the need. For example, they ran an interesting series during the earlier years about a family of five that was befriended by a furniture store employee in Galveston. It seems the family had sick children upon their arrival in Galveston. They were "Norwegian emigrants" unable to speak English. William Jamison served as translator, provider of health care, and later provisioner of funeral needs for two of the children as their parents traveled on inland to their destination. The *News* applauded the energy and time commitment of citizen Jamison and said, "As the tide of immigration through this port is certainly destined to increase, it seems evident that we should have arrangements for the reception and accommodation of immigrants; and we hope the sad incident just related will prove useful in this direction."<sup>4</sup>

As time brought more and more immigrants to the city, formal organizations evolved. One interesting development came because of a planned migration program instituted by a Jewish organization in New York. With the goal of diverting some of the large number of Russian and German Jews

arriving in New York City at the turn of the century, the Jewish Immigration Information Bureau negotiated a chain of transportation supplemented by the interested involvement of Jewish Americans. The idea was to land Jews in a port other than New York, then distribute them to various communities inland that had the ability to find employment for the newcomers. Between 1907 to 1914, the Galveston Movement, as it was called, actively worked to channel Jewish immigration into and through Galveston. Rabbi Henry Cohen served as the point man for developing the operation in Galveston. He coordinated the effort of local congregants to meet the ships upon arrival. Jewish men and women provided meals, housing, translations, and advice in helping the immigrants move to their future homes in the interior. One report of the first ship full of immigrants who arrived under the auspices of this movement on July 1, 1907, was made by the *Chicago Tribune*. In tooting their own horn, the *Galveston Daily News* republished the Chicago article, which stated that "Whether the Jews in Texas form colonies by themselves, as the Scandinavians have done in Minnesota, or disperse among the other inhabitants of Texas, Galveston affords excellent railroad facilities, and in Texas there is room for all."<sup>7</sup> Years later the same newspaper said of the Galveston Movement, "It was a magnificent working system the bureau maintained from its organizations. For its beneficiaries it performed the functions of a practical guardian, 'guide, philosopher and friend.'"<sup>8</sup>

The Jewish immigrants received help and support from their fellow co-religionists. But the spirit of caring was manifest in other organizations as well. The newspaper gave a pat on the back to the city in an article in 1910 entitled, "Immigrants are Well Handled at Galveston." Claiming that Galveston's port has a "reputation of caring," the *Daily News* praised several organizations. The Galveston Immigrants' Home received praise as a missionary endeavor of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, that offered its services to those of any creed "without financial remuneration." Housed at 21st Street and the Strand, the Home, sometimes called the Methodist Home, offered food, bathing facilities, letter-writing materials, help with railroad connections, and interest in personal needs. The Seamen's Home also deserved praise. As a result of the tremendous growth of commerce at the port, the number of ship's workers increased. Galveston responded with a Seamen's home in connection to the Methodist Immigrant Home and so the city put out a hand to those from other countries. The *News* noted that "a large per cent of all the seamen are German in speech," so it probably followed that the large German population in Galveston helped support this work. Another institutional help for immigrants was under the direction of Albion L. Barkman, inspector for the U.S. Immigration Station. This Information Bureau provided news on employment in "different sections of the state" and was a direct outgrowth of the city's sustained effort to get a federal immigration station built in their port.<sup>9</sup>

While there seemed to be a real humanitarian interest in helping the newcomers, there was another side to the interest in providing it. The *Galveston Tribune* expressed openly this other side to the city's work in 1912. "Were it not for the three immigration societies of Galveston the lot of the poor aliens coming here would be indeed a sorry one...without the aid societies

mentioned, it is doubtful whether many of them would be able to find the railway stations and it is certain that only the smallest percentage of them would ever get to their destinations.... The result would be a congestion in Galveston: the port of entry would soon be crowded with immigrants who in due course of time would form Hebrew quarters, German quarters, or whatever their nationality would demand, and they would be little if any better off than before they left their old home." The newspaper gave voice to an otherwise unexpressed fear that too many immigrants would gather in the city or in one part of the city. The assumption was that immigrants of whatever nationality should disperse across the land and become part of the fabric of the American way of life. In this way Galvestonians still saw themselves as the funnel to the hinterlands. While encouraging help for the immigrant, they saw these efforts as a way to keep the newcomer on the move out and through the city. The same article presented a vivid image of this approach by saying that the immigrant was "tagged, placed on board the train and sent through like a piece of baggage, the well organized railroad machinery of this country landing him in the arms of waiting friends at the end of his journey."<sup>10</sup>

Another facet of the picture of Galveston's view of immigration was its intense curiosity and penchant for description of those who were perceived as different. How did Galvestonians, as reflected in the pages of their newspapers, view immigrants? As noted, Galveston liked immigration—it fueled the growth of their port and subsequently their commercial prosperity. Galvestonians often thought of immigrants in terms of the shipping lines they represented rather than as individuals. To the business community of Galveston, it mattered that an Italian line or a Scandinavian line was establishing a route to Galveston. Only secondly did they appear to think in terms of Italians or Danes or Norwegians.<sup>11</sup> How did they react to the individual immigrant? Often they exhibited all the stereotypical utterances regarding immigrants that could be found in any other port city in the United States. For them, the idiosyncrasies of the newcomers were scrutinized although seldom laughed at, while the assumption was that these people would soon be assimilated into the Texas or western milieu.

German immigrants seemed to receive the most press coverage, partly because they were a large number of the earliest migrations to Texas from the 1830s through the 1880s.<sup>12</sup> As a group they were usually praised by those already in Texas and by those in Galveston. In 1878, the *Galveston Daily News* noted that the German Turnverein Society had been the first to begin celebrating "the nation's natal day" after the end of the Civil War. German immigrant enthusiasm for the Fourth of July was watched approvingly. "They will parade the streets in the morning and have all the fun they can devise and enjoy during the daytime and at night will conclude their exercises with a dramatic performance and a ball." Foreign born who delighted in United States rituals pleased the Galvestonians. Their reputation for hard work also preceded the Germans. In 1896 the *News* noted the arrival of the *Halle*, the first ship of the North German Lloyd Line to arrive in Galveston after the accomplishment of deep water over the bar. The *News* praised this arrival with the statement, "A superior looking set they were. They looked like the ordinary German farm people, who know how to make a penny do the work of a nickel

and who are thrifty, thorough and worthy of emulation. All were comfortably dressed and some were more than that, being exceptionally well dressed. They all had money, some of them having as much as \$1100." Galvestonians were definitely into "immigrant watching."<sup>13</sup>

Other nationalities also received intense curiosity and scrutiny, too. Judgments about newcomers abounded. In 1870 one group was seen through the following positive lens: "A large and respectable body of immigrants arrived yesterday by the *Josephine*, consisting entirely of natives of Sweden, who were quite favorable specimens of the rural population of that country. Young, healthy, stout, well-behaved, they form a most satisfactory addition to our force of workers. It was quite a pleasurable sight to see them." Another time the judgment remained positive, but was affected by the unique clothing of the migrants. A steamer arrived in port in 1892 with almost 100 immigrants from Poland and Hungary; noting the old-world costumes of the people, a journalist wrote, "the first impression created on *The News* reporter was much the same as if the figures in an oil painting, illustrating Polish or Hungarian peasantry, had walked out of the frame." Trousers showing inches of skin above the ankle, quaintly collared vests, "clumsy leg boots" and caps adorned the men. According to the reporter, "The women were equally odd in appearance." Shawls, red kerchiefs, and "heavy calf shoes" came in for some ogling. The children were described as "dwarfed imitations of the parents."<sup>14</sup>

One shipload of immigrants received exceptionally intense examination by the *News* reporter. Literally following the ship's manifest, the journalist listed for the readers the many nameless people coming on land. Since the immigrants had to declare the amount of money they were bringing with them, the reporter included that with his observations. We have to wonder to what extent the amount of money colored the rest of the observations of the reporter. The paper told Galvestonians, for example, "Then came a load of Poles. One of the immigrants was a small man with a large overcoat, \$120; a wife with a yellow shawl over her head and two small children." Another Polish immigrant was "a short young man with green eyes set in a broad face, an overcoat and \$10." Next came "a Bohemian who had spent 1 1/2 years in St. Louis and returned to Germany for two years to get a long-stemmed pipe and his wife and two children. They had \$4." Yet another Bohemian was described as "tall and lanky and his hair looked as if it had been cut with the stewpan as a gauge." Then came "a long line of Slavs...all hearty young fellows, variously attired and usually wore a ring, button or some gold ornament in the right ear. One of them carried his accordion by a strap across his shoulder. The others carried nothing." The descriptions ran on for a couple columns.<sup>15</sup>

Watching immigrants could be a pleasant pastime for many. The *News* reported that 880 immigrants had arrived on Sunday October 4, as "nearly the whole German population of Galveston, besides a larger number of other residents, turned out to meet them at the wharf." Obviously the Germans looked to the arrival of more of their countrymen. The newspaper reported that this batch of immigrants "are a most respectable and healthy-looking lot, and seemed evidently much delighted with their new country."<sup>16</sup>

Not all transients left Galveston. The city provided labor for some, family for others, and business opportunities for still more. So another way to analyze Galveston's view of immigration is to look at how they saw the immigrants who remained in town. Galveston seemed to be comfortable with these decisions – at least some Galvestonians were. The *Daily News* noted in 1907 that while many people had entered the country through Galveston over the years, some had chosen to remain in the city. The paper applauded the interest by some newcomers in becoming citizens. Proud that “such a large number decide on this city as their home in their adopted country,” one newspaper article listed the people, not by name, but by nationality and job. “From far-away Turkey 9 subjects have journeyed, their occupations being given as follows: Seven laborers, 1 fireman, 1 seaman.” The list of various immigrants from other nations continued. Tucked in one paragraph was a lone comment about gender. “Sweden furnished 16 citizens for Galveston, according to the naturalizations statistics, whose occupations were divided up as follows: Seven laborers, 2 sailors, 1 fireman, 1 locomotive fireman, 1 seaman, 1 cook, 1 carpenter, 1 blacksmith, 1 servant. Sweden also enjoys the distinction of sending the only woman to have declared her intention of becoming a naturalized citizen.”<sup>17</sup>

The mere presence of so many foreign born people in Galveston also demonstrates the city's acceptance of them. Statistics can provide one dimension to describing the city and thus its views on life – its philosophy of living with those perceived as “other.” Using figures from 1910, the Census Bureau tabulated information for selected Texas cities. Galveston had a population of 36,981 and 16,252 of them were foreign born or the first generation of foreign born. Dallas had a total population of 92,104 with 14,297 of those recent migrants to the city. Thus Galveston's foreign element was twenty-seven percent of its total, while Dallas had ten percent. State wide the figure was nine percent foreign born out of a total population of 3,896,542.<sup>18</sup>

In general, Galvestonian's viewed immigration as a product of their port's activity. They welcomed immigration and seemed to be comfortable with the concept of increasing the current of migration, especially through the city. They conceived of their task as one of “funneling” immigration to the interior. This perception also manifest itself in their view of themselves as a facilitating link in the process. Even when it came to perceiving the individual immigrant as part of that flow, the newspapers, at least, seemed to reflect the business community's view of curiosity in the unusual as well as pleasure in the activity of migration.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>*Galveston Daily News*, May 1, 1870. Hereinafter cited as *GDN*.

<sup>2</sup>*GDN*, February 2, 1871.

<sup>3</sup>*GDN*, September 21, 1882.

<sup>4</sup>*Galveston Tribune*, May 21, 1907. Hereinafter cited as *GT*.

<sup>5</sup>*GDN*, September 30, 1885; *GDN*, October 7, 1881; *GDN*, November 11, 1880. For additional references to the rail connection with Galveston, see also *GDN*, September 24, 1882; *GDN*, March 15, 1909.

<sup>6</sup>*GDN*, October 29, 1869; *GDN*, November 3, 1869.

<sup>7</sup>*GDN*, August 17, 1907.

<sup>9</sup>*GDN*, September 27, 1914. An extensive account of the Galveston Movement has been written by Bernard Marinbach, *Galveston: Ellis Island of the West* (Albany, 1983); other sources include *The Man Who Stayed in Texas, the Life of Rabbi Henry Cohen*, by Anne Nathan and Harry I. Cohen (New York, 1941); the Rabbi Henry Cohen Papers (#79-0033) at the Rosenberg Library, Galveston, Texas; Ronald A. Axelrod, "Rabbi Henry Cohen and the Galveston Immigration Movement, 1907-1914," *East Texas Historical Journal*, 15 (1977) pp. 24-37. Some representative newspaper articles include *GDN*, June 21, 1907; July 2, 1907; August 17, 1907; March 15, 1908; March 7, 1911; September 27, 1914; October 2, 1914.

<sup>9</sup>*GDN*, February 27, 1910; for specific information on the Methodist Immigrant Home, see *GDN*, July 19, 1908; *GDN*, September 17, 1908; *GDN*, March 15, 1909; for specific information on the Federal Bureau of Information for immigrants, see *GDN*, April 25, 1908; *GDN*, March 18, 1909.

Galveston worked hard throughout the last quarter of the nineteenth century to deepen their harbor for oceangoing vessels and to procure the construction of a federal immigration station and quarantine station. The story of these stations is also chronicled in the newspapers of the time. For the immigration station see *GDN*, February 1, 1906; June 11, 1906; June 12, 1906; June 20, 1906; October 9, 1906; March 30, 1907; July 23, 1907; November 1, 1907; October 6, 1909; March 28, 1912; *GT*, May 23, 1907; May 16, 1912. For the quarantine station see *GDN*, September 3, 1893; *GT*, May 20, 1907; see also the secondary source Larry J. Wygant, "The Galveston quarantine stations, 1853-1950" in *Texas Medicine*, 82 (June 1986) pp. 49-52.

<sup>10</sup>*GT*, May 16, 1912.

<sup>11</sup>*GT*, May 14, 1907; *GT*, June 3, 1907; *GDN*, May 30, 1893; *GDN*, July 24, 1907.

<sup>12</sup>An excellent account of German immigration to Texas can be found in *German Seed in Texas Soil* (Austin, 1966), by Terry Jordan.

<sup>13</sup>*GDN*, June 22, 1978; *GDN*, October 10, 1896.

<sup>14</sup>*Flakes' Bulletin*, May 24, 1870; *GDN*, August 28, 1892.

<sup>15</sup>*GDN*, October 10, 1896.

<sup>16</sup>*GDN*, October 5, 1885.

<sup>17</sup>*GDN*, September 28, 1907.

<sup>18</sup>*Galveston City Directory*, 1913.